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CASE STUDY



Educational Quality Improvement Program
Policy • Systems • Management

Meeting EFA: Egypt Community Schools

Introduction

Improved access to education in underserved areas represented a critical challenge in Egypt in the 1990s. Enrollment rates in Upper Egypt, especially for girls, were below the national average, and many small communities in the southern half of the country had virtually no schooling services. Education quality was also a national concern, and the education system was seen as in crisis. An agreement between the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Egyptian Ministry of Education launched the community school initiative in Upper Egypt in 1992 as a "joint venture for quality innovative education through genuine community participation," according to Malak Zaalouk on page 35 of 2004's *The Pedagogy of Empowerment: Community Schools as a Social Movement in Egypt*. The Ministry agreed to pay the salaries of teachers, provide materials, and support curriculum and teacher training. UNICEF developed a model for quality community-based education, designed to respond to the needs of Upper Egypt's underserved areas.

Rural parents in early 1990s Egypt were commonly perceived as not interested in educating their daughters. Research commissioned by UNICEF at that time discovered that parents and local religious leaders did not object in principle to girls' education in many cases and frequently expressed support and desire for it. However, the research found that communities did object to the specific conditions under which traditional education systems offered schooling, including:

- The safety of girls who had to walk to distant village schools;
- Classrooms with male or non-local teachers; and
- School hours that kept girls from contributing to their daily household economies.

Based on this research and international experience, UNICEF developed a model and implemented the community school project through local nongovernmental organizations with the intention of experimenting, nurturing, and slowly expanding. The objective was to develop a system through which innovations in community and school interactions, instructional methods, and classroom management could be tested and evaluated as a basis for learning and eventual application on a broader scale in schools throughout Egypt, not necessarily to create a large-scale project.

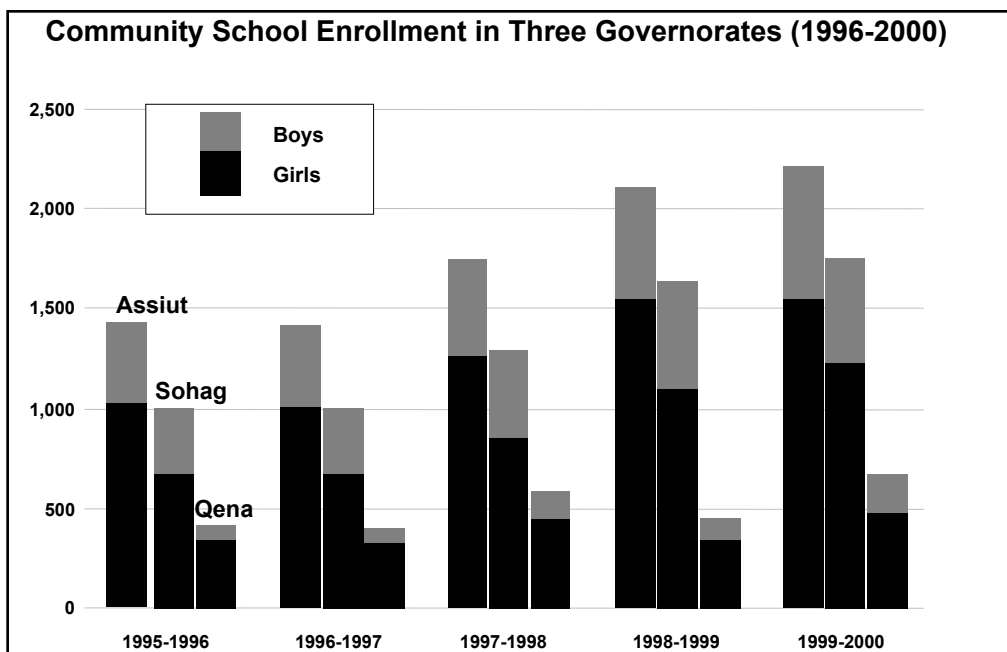
This EQUIP2 Case Study looks at UNICEF and the Egyptian Ministry of Education's joint experience in Upper Egypt during the latter half of the 1990s and examines the extent to which community schools successfully provided access, completion, and learning, especially for girls, in three Upper Egypt governorates. The cost and cost-effectiveness of the community schools are compared to government schools. Additionally, the study highlights features developed, tested, refined over time, and deemed critical to the success of the model.

Access

While education data from mid-1990s Egypt can be considered suspect in the light of enrollment rates reported at over 100 percent, Farrukh Iqbal and Nagwa Riad reported the net enrollment rate reached 83 percent for girls and 90 percent for boys in 1996-1997 in their paper for The World Bank, “Increasing Girls’ School Enrollment in the Arab Republic of Egypt,” presented at Scaling Up Poverty Reduction: A Global Learning Process and Conference in 2004. However, national rates do not distinguish the regions where enrollment rates were considerably lower. For example, in the Assuit, Souhag, and Qena governorates where UNICEF’s community schools project was concentrated, net enrollment rates for girls, reported as 63 percent, 61 percent, and 71 percent respectively in 1996-1997 by Iqbal and Riad, were well below the national average.

Governorate-level statistics do not reveal that access—girls’ access in particular—was most limited in Upper Egypt’s small, rural hamlets. These hamlets are usually a long distance from a central village primary school. However, parents in surrounding villages are reluctant to allow their daughters to walk to these village schools. As a result, in certain rural areas of Upper Egypt, female enrollment rates were as low as 10 to 15 percent, according to Joseph Farrell in 2003’s “Case Study: The Egyptian Community Schools Program.” The UNICEF-Ministry project responded by specifically targeting small hamlets with at least 50 out-of-school children.

The pilot phase of the community schools project lasted from 1992 to 1995 and established 38 schools that served 1,037 students, 63 percent of whom were girls. This case study focuses on the project’s development phase from 1995 to 1999, during which the community schools expanded to include 202 school sites, enrolling 4,656 students, 70 percent of whom were girls, according to Zaalouk in *The Pedagogy of Empowerment*.



An experimental version of the community-based schooling model was designed and implemented during the pilot phase, presenting important lessons about the capacities needed for successful implementation, the pedagogical model's utility, and the nature of partnerships between nongovernmental organizations, the Ministry of Education, and communities. The development and expansion phases of the project intended to refine the model, expand the network of schools and communities, and consolidate the partnerships critical to implementation. During the expansion phase, stakeholders reached consensus on the definition of sustainability and used program evaluations to clearly identify the model's components most critical to success and that therefore should be diffused.

The approach through which lessons learned were to be taken to scale relied not on continued expansion of the project, but on transferring the lessons and critical components of the model's success to other efforts in Egypt to expand access and improve quality. UNICEF and the Ministry of Education conceived the community schools project as a relatively small system demonstrating a pedagogical model that would work effectively with children of primary school age. When the Egyptian government developed a program to establish one-room rural schools, the community schools project was seen as the model on which to base that approach. The UNICEF model also inspired other organizations such as CARE to implement similar community school projects.

Completion

In *The Pedagogy of Empowerment*, Zaalouk reports the community school grade five completion rate in Assuit, Sohag, and Qena at 92 percent. Although disaggregated data on fifth grade completion in Egypt is difficult to obtain, observed trends make it safe to assume that the public school completion rate in rural Upper Egypt would be considerably lower than the national rate of 90 percent reported by the World Bank in 2000. Zaalouk provides some data on primary school completion and the continuation of community school students into secondary school and beyond:

Egypt Community School Graduates from Fifth Grade (1997-2001)

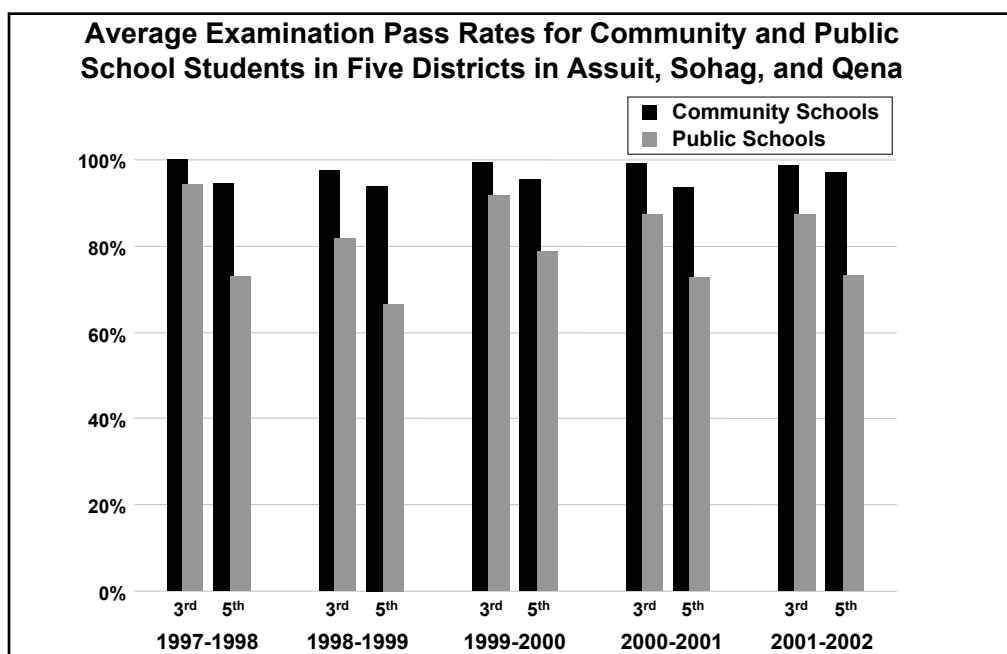
1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
73	383	421	980	2,382

Zaalouk reports that in 2002, 2,393 community school graduates were in preparatory school and 241 were in secondary school, including 40 of the 1997 fifth grade graduates in their final year of secondary school.

Learning

The community schools project emphasized assuring quality education for rural children, especially girls. Student performance data reveal that the community school model was a resounding success in terms of students able to pass official Ministry of Education examinations in third and fifth grade. Zaalouk's data in *The Pedagogy of Empowerment* from 1997 through 2001 show that community school students in five Assuit, Sohag,

and Qena districts consistently outperformed their public school third and fifth grade district counterparts. Community school third graders passed at an average of 99 percent in 2001, compared to 87 percent in public schools in the same districts. The average pass rate for community school fifth graders that year was 97 percent, compared to 73 percent in the counterpart public schools. The following chart shows how consistently community school students outperformed their public school counterparts from 1997 through 2001.



Transformation

Beyond the community schools' education outcomes, their success has dramatically changed certain aspects of life in Upper Egypt. According to Zaalouk, children in community schools demonstrated a positive sense of self and their role as active learners. In particular, girls began to see themselves as educated, capable, and empowered. Families have begun to value children's schooling and have ceased consigning their girls to labor and chores at the expense of education. Children have become role models for their families and communities, helping adults see the importance of learning, freedom, and progress. Community school governance has also provided Upper Egypt with new decision-making processes and models of collective action.

Costs and Cost-Effectiveness

Analysis of cost-effectiveness reflects the different government, project, and local community costs for and contributions to establishing and running community schools in Upper Egypt. Available data make it possible to assess the start-up and operating costs for project schools in 1998-1999, towards the end of the expansion phase. The following table, with data from Zaalouk's *The Pedagogy of Empowerment*, shows how total costs were broken down.

Egypt Community School Project Costs by Partner

Source	Category	Amount (U.S. dollars)
Ministry of Education	Facilitator salaries and books	\$253,172
Project	Supervision (salaries and transportation)	\$71,711
Project	Training	\$94,557
Project	Supplies	\$58,563
Project	Administration	\$3,087
Community Schools	TOTAL	\$431,090

Excluding land and buildings, the recurrent cost per pupil was \$114 for 187 community schools enrolling 4,208 students. Data on the cost of government schools in Egypt are difficult to locate. Zaalouk estimated national per pupil recurrent costs for public schools in 1998-1999 at \$164.

Unit costs and primary school completion and student learning data are used to compare the cost-effectiveness of community schools and public schools. The following table shows that community schools were considerably more cost-effective than public schools at producing fifth grade completers who could pass the national examination in Upper Egypt.

Cost-Effectiveness of Community Schools vs. Public Schools in Egypt

	Rural Upper Egypt Community Schools	National Public Schools
Recurrent unit cost per student	\$114	\$164
Fifth grade completion rate	92%	90%
Cost per fifth grade completer	\$620	\$911
Fifth grade examination pass rate	94%	73%
Cost per fifth grade student passing national exam	\$659	\$1,248

Due to lower unit recurrent costs and a slightly higher fifth grade completion rate, Upper Egypt community schools have a cost per fifth grade completer over 30 percent lower than the government cost per completer. Because the fifth grade examination pass rate for community schools is significantly higher than for public schools, the cost per community school student able to pass the examine is almost half of that for public schools. Since data on costs are somewhat difficult to obtain and, once obtained, often not easily analyzed, the estimations of cost-effectiveness are not meant to be definitive calculations but are indicative of whether funds invested in these kinds of projects can lead to results that are within acceptable cost limits. Even if Egyptian community schools and public schools had the exact same recurrent costs, the community schools would still be more cost-effective by nature of the higher rate at which they produce fifth grade students who demonstrate an acceptable level of learning by passing the national exam.



Critical Features

In her comprehensive analysis of community schools in Upper Egypt, *The Pedagogy of Empowerment*, Zaalouk identifies what she describes as the “pillars of the project”—the project features most important for successes in enrollment, primary school completion, facilitation of learning, and cost-effectiveness.

Community Participation

Education committees form at each school, functioning as local school boards. The school curriculum and activities focus on the community’s work and are embedded in the local culture. The community provides a school site in existing infrastructure deemed suitable for the number of children to be enrolled, determines the hours and days school will be in session, and participates in teacher selection. The school serves as a site for an integrated development approach, offering courses outside of regular school hours, including parenting classes, preschool and daycare, non-formal adolescent education, environmental education, and hygiene, health, and nutrition classes.

Because the Ministry of Education pays teacher salaries, and the Ministry and UNICEF supply materials, the communities ensure that education remains truly free for students enrolled in their schools. Community schools charge no fees, require no uniforms, nor impose hidden costs. Moreover, the expensive private tutoring ubiquitous in Egypt is absent from community schools.

Partnerships

From its inception, the Upper Egypt community schools model has relied on collaboration between UNICEF and the Ministry of Education, which has ensured the Ministry’s investment in the project’s success and sustainability—paying teacher salaries, providing supplies, participating in staff training and school supervision, and formally recognizing the community schools by issuing students official primary school certificates at the end of fifth grade. The Ministry and other education institutions helped develop a rigorous teacher training curriculum, refined the community school curriculum and pedagogy, and administered student exams and evaluations. Communities have also been essential partners by serving on education committees, playing active roles in the schools, including teaching or supervising students. Local nongovernmental organizations provide field presence for the establishment, management, supervision, support, and ongoing evaluation of schools.

Multi-Ability/Multi-Grade, Child-Centered Teaching

In community schools, children between the ages of six and 12 gain access to the primary cycle. Classes are usually limited to 30 students in a multi-age group supervised by two facilitators. Pupils are organized according to ability and the pace at which they learn, but within the same classroom. Facilitators and teachers tailor activities to each group, allowing higher-paced students to sometimes complete the primary cycle in three years. Instruction is child-centered, and cooperative learning is widely practiced. Facilitators and children develop materials together that are used in the classroom.

The program draws on the experience, values, and inputs of an entire network of local community members, program staff, government representatives, nongovernmental organizations, and Ministry of Education staff at the district, governorate, and national level. The instructional methods are based on the best existing research on multi-grade classrooms and girl-friendly methods. According to Ash Hartwell's paper prepared for the 1997 Council for International Exchange of Scholars (CIES) Conference, "Applying What We Know about Learning to Projects: The Experience of Community Schools in Upper Egypt," school is scheduled, space is organized, furnishings are chosen, and a variety of instructional materials are developed to maximize students' opportunities for self- and peer-directed learning.

In "Case Study: The Egyptian Community Schools Program," Farrell painted a vivid picture of community school pedagogy and instructional activities. Learning is self-directed to a large extent, with students spending a significant portion of the day working individually or in small groups on self-planned projects in 'learning corners' devoted to Arabic, math, science, general knowledge, and art. Students are required to report to the entire class on their individual work at the end of each school day. A shorter portion of each day is devoted to whole class activity directed by the facilitators, individual students, or small groups, which may also involve presentations by adult community members with special knowledge in a particular curricular area. The class may also engage in discussion of a given issue or plan a presentation for the community, involving skits, songs, dances, and games.

Selection of and Ongoing Training and Support for Facilitators

Young women are recruited locally to be facilitators, with special attention paid to their capacity for innovation, creativity, and sensitivity to children's needs. They are required to have an intermediate level of education equivalent to primary plus three years of lower secondary, usually making them among the most educated women in the community. The education committee interviews candidates to select a core group and reserves to train for each class. Reserves substitute for absent facilitators or travel around to support other facilitators.

Facilitators undergo rigorous pre-service training in three phases. The initial orientation workshop is residential, lasts eight to 10 days, and introduces participants to the principles governing the community schools, including problem solving, planning, scientific thinking, and communication skills. According to Zaalouk on page 58 of *The Pedagogy of Empowerment*, participants experience "relationships that are quite different from the authoritarian formats they are accustomed to," stressing teamwork. A second pre-service residential workshop also lasting eight to 10 days addresses activity-based learning and includes subjects such as lesson planning, authentic student evaluation, creating learning activities and materials, grouping, and classroom management through student participation. The third pre-service training activity includes two to four weeks of classroom observations in existing community schools, emphasizing open-ended questions to stimulate effective student thinking and understanding.

Upon completion of the three phases of pre-service training, new facilitators are officially recognized as members of the Egyptian teaching force. They are paid by the Egyptian government based on a salary rate established within the national teacher salary grid at a level below formally certified primary teachers who have completed a program at a University Faculty of Education. Refresher training is also provided every other year and targets both community school facilitators and teachers in government supported one-classroom schools.

In addition to their preparatory training, ongoing facilitator in-service is a continuous and intensive process. Facilitators engage in scheduled end-of-class daily meetings with their partners that provide time for self-reflection and exchange of ideas for improvement. In these daily meetings, facilitators note questions or issues to bring up at the weekly meetings with cluster supervisors, which help facilitators solve problems and plan collectively based on others' experiences. These weekly meetings often also include teachers and supervisors from the one-classroom schools in the district. Every two weeks, the facilitators in each school meet with the local school committee to get feedback from parents and community members on their work and discuss how to address problems.

In addition to ongoing in-service training, a supervisory and support system ensures the quality and continuous improvement of instruction. A field supervisory team and a technical supervisory team manage and monitor the community schools initiative, both of which supervise and direct the schools and carry out on-the-job training. These teams also handle ongoing evaluation and maintain links between the schools and communities, as well as expanding a network of affiliates who offer special expertise to facilitators, including universities and nongovernmental organizations.

Management of the Initiative

Local nongovernmental organizations manage the community school initiative at the governorate level. Each governorate has a project manager and deputy manager in addition to the supervisory staff who work at the district and village level. According to Zaalouk on page 42 of *The Pedagogy of Empowerment*, the management of the initiative “tends to be flat and highly participatory, as opposed to rigid and hierarchical.” Management and supervisory teams are trained on team building and teamwork, and evaluations are team-based. The management culture of the initiative has been characterized as a ‘living system’ with effort devoted to continuous improvement, even adopting a Total Quality Management approach in its later stages. Collaboration between the implementing organizations, UNICEF, the Ministry of Education, and various Egyptian educational institutions has enabled the project to draw on a range of technical, field, and managerial expertise, all contributing to a learning systems approach to the initiative.

The Policy and Institutional Context

The Egyptian Ministry of Education exercised notable foresight by launching the community schools initiative in 1992 in partnership with UNICEF as a response to the

education crisis it recognized in the late 1980s and early 1990s. This partnership established a critical working relationship between UNICEF and the more progressive elements within the Ministry, helping to ensure success. The Ministry demonstrated its support by paying teacher salaries, providing school books and teachers' guides, contributing to the development of curriculum and teacher training programs, and assuring school feeding. UNICEF designed the model of community education, provided training for program staff, and ensured management and ongoing support through its partnerships with local nongovernmental organizations.

By agreeing to collaborate fully with the project and by assuring from the beginning its financial and institutional contribution to the program, the government effectively cleared space in the educational landscape for this experiment in community-based schooling. The success of the Egyptian community school initiative has triggered and facilitated an informed reform dialogue over the past decade. Lessons learned have not only included how to effectively provide education to children in remote areas and target girls, but also how to engage students, teachers, and communities in ongoing, active learning and democratic decision making.

Not only was this effort structured as a partnership from the beginning, it was also recognized as a 'seed bed' for reform, rather than a scaleable operation. The project emphasized disseminating lessons learned and establishing best practices for new and existing initiatives to increase widespread impact, rather than expand the project itself. On pages 173-174 of *The Pedagogy of Empowerment*, Zaalouk identifies six pieces of institutional infrastructure in Egypt that are critical to dissemination and sustenance of the community schools' impact:

- The Education Innovation Committee shaped education policy to support innovation and acted as a think tank and source of technical support for the implementation of quality standards. Several key ministerial decrees to promote education innovation are attributed to the Education Innovation Committee's work. When the government chose to launch its one-classroom schools, the Education Innovation Committee linked the community schools' experience to the model's development. The committee also communicates the community schools' lessons to mainstream Egyptian elementary schools through the development and implementation of education standards.
- The Ministry of Education's nongovernmental organization department provides an official channel to promote and set up partnerships between government and civil society actors supported by external or internal donors.
- The Center for Curriculum and Instructional Materials Development draws on the experience of teachers making instructional materials that successfully promote active learning in their classrooms. It puts together kits of materials and teachers' manuals for use throughout Egypt.
- The National Center for Examinations and Educational Evaluations has worked with the community schools initiative to develop indicators of effective schools that serve as guidelines for school accreditation.



The general strategy was never to directly expand the community schools system. The objectives were to keep the system relatively small, maintain and evaluate its quality, and diffuse lessons first to the one-classroom schools system, followed by the mainstream primary school system.

An agreement with the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) provided funding to expand the community schools system from around 200 to a maximum of 300 schools in the original three governorates of Upper Egypt. The agreement also facilitated linkages between community schools and the one-classroom schools in those governorates. The project includes a provision for transferring 25 well-established community schools from UNICEF to the Egyptian Ministry of Education every year, with UNICEF adding 25 new schools each year to its system, therefore maintaining the target maximum of 300 schools.

Thus, the current phase of the community school initiative includes ongoing operation of schools, direct transfer of schools to the Ministry system, and continued diffusion of lessons learned. For example, the basic pedagogical model is influencing other areas in Egypt through additional donor-supported efforts. International donor-supported programs have included part of the community schools pedagogical model in their assistance to the Ministry of Education, including major projects supported by the World Bank/European Community, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and CARE.

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Acknowledgements

This paper was written for EQUIP2 by Joseph DeStefano (Center for Collaboration and the Future of Schooling), 2006, and draws heavily on a comprehensive study and analysis of the UNICEF community schools project done by Malak Zaalouk in *The Pedagogy of Empowerment: Community Schools as a Social Movement in Egypt*. An EQUIP2 synthesis paper collecting findings from eight case studies in complementary education is also available.

EQUIP2: Educational Policy, Systems Development, and Management is one of three USAID-funded Leader with Associates Cooperative Agreements under the umbrella heading Educational Quality Improvement Program (EQUIP). As a Leader with Associates mechanism, EQUIP2 accommodates buy-in awards from USAID bureaus and missions to support the goal of building education quality at the national, sub-national, and cross-community levels.

The Academy for Educational Development (AED) is the lead organization for the global EQUIP2 partnership of education and development organizations, universities, and research institutions. The partnership includes fifteen major organizations and an expanding network of regional and national associates throughout the world: Aga Khan Foundation, American Institutes for Research, CARE, Center for Collaboration and the Future of Schooling, East-West Center, Education Development Center, International Rescue Committee, Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr. Foundation, Michigan State University, Mississippi Consortium for International Development, ORC Macro, Research Triangle Institute, University of Minnesota, University of Pittsburgh Institute of International Studies in Education, Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children.

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